EXHIBITION OF CONTEMPORARY BRITISH ETCHINGS ASSEMBLED BY LAWRENCE BINYON CURATOR OF DIVISION OF PRINTS BRITISH MUSEUM

THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART
OCTOBER 1–NOVEMBER 30, 1921

INTRODUCTION

It is a little over a century since the art of original etching began to be revived in the British Isles. Crome and one or two others in England, Wilkie and Andrew Geddes in Scotland, etched a certain number of original designs on copper in the early years of the nineteenth century, using the medium as it had but rarely been used since the time of Rembrandt and Ostade, that is, as a means of self-expression in this particular medium and not merely as a means of reproducing a design or a picture already made. Etching has its own idiom, an idiom of peculiar charm but of definite limitations. The "needle"—the pointed steel which is the etcher's tool—removes the varnish, with which the plate is covered, from the lines it traces; the acid bath in which the plate is plunged bites into the copper just along those lines; and in the resulting prints from this bitten tracery the line has a particular character,—even, and not modulated by the pressure or movement of the hand, nor the tapering away at end like the stroke of pencil and chalk. At the same time the etcher's hand can move freely and lightly. His needle does not plough into the copper, unlike the engraver's burin, which has to furrow the resisting metal; therefore, a certain spontaneousness of treatment, as of a sketcher keen on the essentials of his theme, is natural in an etching. The beauty of the arabesque of bitten lines printed in black ink on white paper is something which is easily appreciated as a beauty not attainable by other means. The true etcher has this particular beauty in view from the first. Used merely as a translation, therefore, from another medium, a design drawn with pen, brush, pencil or chalk, each of which has its own appropriate felicity—etching loses character and charm.

The English and Scottish pioneers of a hundred years ago did not explore the possibilities of the medium very far but Geddes, following Rembrandt's practice, was fond of using dry-point to give colour and richness of tone to a foundation of bitten lines. "Dry-point" dispenses with acid and like the graver or burin attacks the bare copper, throwing up on each side of the line it furrows a raised rough edge which catches the ink and prints a

more or less clotted and velvety black. This "bur" can be scraped away or left at will: the line engraver scrapes it away, because he wants a clean, pure line; but the etcher likes to use the effect of the "bur" for its richness and bloom. Dry-point used by itself, without any foundation of bitten lines, has again a beauty of its own. You feel a sense of movement and modulation in the line: it is capable of great force and of great subtlety. The dry-point moves freely over the copper like a pencil; it is not pushed forward like a plough as the graver is; and by this freedom it allies itself congenially with the etcher's medium and the two methods are classed together in common use under the general term of etching. But words convey little as to the specific beauty or character of an artist's medium: a little study of actual examples carries one straight to the heart of the matter.

It was not till the second half of the 19th century that artists in Britain began to realize the beauty and richness of the etcher's resources, and it was an American and a Frenchman, both working in England, who fully opened their eyes. To Whistler more than any other man—Whistler, one of the greatest, and as some think, the very greatest of all masters of the art—is due the revival of original etchings which has been proceeding so fruitfully ever since, though it would be wrong to overlook the stimulating efforts of Seymour Haden, who so well understood the capacities of the medium. Méryon, half English by birth, though he had no connection with England in his life, proved in time an inspiring influence for more than one British etcher. But another great French master, Alphonse Legros, spent most of his life in London, adopted English nationality, and as a Professor at the Slade School in London University, taught a whole generation of young Englishmen to etch.

The present exhibition begins, in point of date, with that generation. The most able and devoted of Legros' pupils, William Strang, was living when this exhibition was planned, but died in the spring of 1921, still in the fullness of his powers. He is represented here by two of his earlier subject pieces and by three of his later portraits, but these few specimens give hardly

an idea of the range of his capacity, though they show something of his rugged power and his severe and searching draughtsmanship. Strang was a great technician, deeply interested in his medium, and experimenting to the last. He invented a graver of his own, which having a sharp hook at the end could be drawn down the plate instead of being pushed forward across its surface and could therefore be used with much more flexibility and ease. I believe this instrument was used in the "Thomas Hardy," one of his last plates. The graver suited his fine, firm draughtsmanship. He would take a large plate and engrave a portrait on the bare metal without any preliminary drawing, in a few hours. This was an astonishing feat of mastery. Strang's work—he etched over six hundred plates, besides being a prolific draughtsman and painter—shows a steady progress throughout his life, though not all his experiments were successful. His latest portrait heads have a solidity and subtlety which will give them a secure rank among the classics of the etcher's art, with the famous etched portraits of Van Dyck.

If Strang followed Legros, sometimes with too close a fidelity, another Scot, D. Y. Cameron, took, for a time at least, Méryon as his examplar. He has emerged from that phase, and his plates of Highland landscape are entirely original and his own. Of late years he has etched little, having become one of the finest of living landscape painters and devoting more time to brush and canvas than to needle and acid, but he is a born etcher, who will doubtless return to his love (he has made some fine prints quite recently) and his is one of the great names in modern etching.

Another very fine landscape painter, George Clausen, is an etcher, and one or two of his plates are shown here. Clausen is of an older generation and stands somewhat apart, belonging to no particular group. Walter Sickert, who years ago worked as a friend and associate of Whistler, is another independent and rather isolated figure, though he has had great influence as a painter on a group of younger artists. That influence is manifest in the etchings of Sylvia Gosse, who however is more than a mere follower of her master.

Two years older than Strang, Sir Frank Short, has confined his activities to etching and engraving and has produced a mass of prints in various technical methods. The two men were elected Associates of the Royal Academy, as engravers, in the same year. Both had established their reputation in the nineties of last century. Sir Frank Short is a consummate craftsman and knows all the secrets. He is almost best known by his marvellous mezzotints after the sepia drawings which Turner made for the Liber Studiorum but never published. It is indeed as a master of tone that Short excels, and his original mezzotints and aquatints show him to greater advantage than his etchings.

With the present century new forces came into play. It is noticeable how much Scotland, the county of Geddes and Wilkie, has contributed to the revival of etching in Britain. Like Cameron and Strang, Muirhead Bone is a Scotsman, and no one has won a higher reputation among contemporary etchers. His prints are eagerly sought for all over the world. In his own domain a peerless draughtsman, he accomplishes miracles of precision and delicacy with the blackest and softest of lead pencils. On the copper his favorite tool is the dry-point, and with that too he does wonders. The most intricate and difficult subjects delight him. Look at "Cubross Roofs," for example, with its maze of lines at all angles. Muirhead Bone was one of the first to seize the beauty of those monstrous scaffoldings which are sometimes so much more impressive than the buildings for which they make way. Some of the finest prints are inspired by motives of this kind—the ever-changing scene of destruction and construction characteristic of the modern city. But he has done few things more satisfying than the beautiful "Rainy Night in Rome."

Bone's etchings, even when he attacks large and complicated subjects, have always a sort of intimate character. Frank Brangwyn, who only took up etching after he had achieved a great reputation as a painter, is an artist of very different temperament. He is the reverse of "intimate," loving breadth of design, strong contrasts, and grandiose conceptions. He was born at Bruges and one might almost fancy that something of

the great Flemish traditions had infused itself into his veins. He is a prodigal of invention, like Rubens, and delights to work on a heroic scale. Acclaimed on the Continent as the foremost of British artists, he is appreciated in his own country but less enthusiastically accepted. Whatever may be said of his tendency to a theatrical violence of lighting, no one can deny the bigness and force of his design. Careless of the "orthodox" dogma that etchings ought not to exceed a certain limited size, Brangwyn delights in plates of magnificent proportions, and, as with the superb great prints of Piranesi, scale counts in the impressiveness of some, if not all, of his larger compositions.

In English art at the present day no one is more prominent, certainly no one more discussed, than Augustus John. A man of genius and ambition he has worked with fitful energy and imperfect concentration; his achievement never seems quite commensurate with his gift. Etching has been a by-play with him and in his small plates he has adopted a manner curiously different from the open, easy power of his masterly drawings in line. Modelled on the earlier work of Rembrandt, John's plates are yet full of personal atmosphere and have the strange vitality and expressiveness that he puts into all his work.

A brilliant etcher who has won in a few years a commanding reputation is James McBey, yet another Scot. His etchings cover little more than the decade just past—he first exhibited in 1911—but he had won distinction before the War broke out and during the War he was, like Muirhead Bone and the able portraitist Francis Dodd, sent out as one of the official artists with the British Armies. McBey had already found congenial motives for prints in Morocco, and was now sent to Palestine. Some of the finest work that he has done on copper is inspired by experiences on the Desert Front. With sparing touches and vivid lines he evokes the wide glare on the immense horizons. The East has lured also E. S. Lumsden, McBey's exact contemporary, but not the nearer East of Morocco and Syria so much as the remoter East of India and Tibet. Lumsden is fascinated by the throngs of pious bathers in the Ganges, by the strange rites of Lamas in Tibetan temples, and by the sun-

bathed Oriental architecture, with its great wall-spaces and deep shadowed porticoes. But it is his feeling for line that gives him rank as an etcher. Much may be expected of him.

As a contrast to these exotic scenes, consider the homely charm of the English country-side in the prints of W. P. Robins, whose quiet sincerity is an unfailing source of strength.

It would be rash to prophesy about these younger men. Who knows which will suddenly make a spurt and forge ahead of his compeers? Still younger men like Leslie Brockhurst, and John Wheatley, and Edmund Blampied are also to be reckoned with, to say nothing of Eileen Soper, who at the age of thirteen finds her etchings hung on the walls of the Royal Academy.

The etchers already named in this brief sketch form a group which would make any period memorable in the history of original engraving. But the world does not yet know their full achievement. Many of them may yet produce plates surpassing anything they have done; in fact it is almost certain that they will. For, be it remembered, nearly all these artists are either in the maturity of their powers or in the promise of a youth yet unripened. They make a brilliant band, and we in Britain are proud of them.

LAWRENCE BINYON

Catalogues of the work of the following etchers have been published. These are referred to in the present exhibition catalogue, the numbers quoted being preceded by the initials of the compilers of the respective lists of etchings:

CLAUSEN: Catalogue of his etchings by Frank Gibson, in The Print Collector's Quarterly, Vol. 8, No. 2.

SHORT: The etched and engraved work of Frank Short; by E. F. Strange. George Allen, London, 1908.

STRANG: William Strang: Catalogue of his etched work, with essay by L. Binyon (supplement, 1912). Illustrated. Madehose, Glasgow, 1906.

CAMERON: D. Y. Cameron: an illustrated catalogue of his etched work; by Frank Rinder. Madehose, Glasgow, 1912.

BRANGWYN: Catalogue of the etched work of Frank Brangwyn. Illustrated. The Fine Arts Society, London, 1912.

BONE: Etchings and drypoints by Muirhead Bone. 1898-1907. A catalogue by Campbell Dodgson. Obach and Co., London, 1909.

JOHN: A catalogue of etchings by Augustus John, 1901-1914; by Campbell Dodgson. Chenil and Co., London, 1920.

HANKEY: The etched work by W. Lee Hankey, R. E., 1904 to 1920; by Martin Hardie. Lefevre and Son, London, 1921.

LUMSDEN: The etchings of E. S. Lumsden (1905-1921); by M. Salaman. In The Print Collector's Quarterly, Vol. 8, No. 1.

GEORGE CLAUSEN, R. A. (b. 1852)

1 A Peep Through Trees (G. 25)
2 Journey by Night (G. 19)
3 Rickyard: Frosty Morning (G. 20)

FRANK SHORT, R. A. (b. 1857)

4 Timber Raft on the Rhine (S. 240). Mezzotint, after a water-color by Turner.
5 Sunrise o'er Whitby Scaur (S. 220). Aquatint.
6 The Curfew: Rye, Sussex (S. 75). Aquatint.
7 Polperro Harbour (S. 105)
8 A Dutch Greengrocerie (S. 110)
9 A Span of Old Battersea Bridge (S. 226). Aquatint.

WILLIAM STRANG, R. A. (b. 1859, d. 1921)

10 Taking the Oath (B. 131)
11 Socialists (B. 188)
12 Joseph Chamberlain (B. 466)
13 G. Bernard Shaw (B. 479)
14 Thomas Hardy

WALTER SICKERT (b. 1860)

15 The Old Middlesex Music Hall
16 Ennui

HORACE MANN LIVENS (b. 1862)

17 Two Hens
18 November

DAVID YOUNG CAMERON, R. A. (b. 1865)

19 The Dolphins (R. 115, 2nd state)
20 Alkmaar (R. 124)
21 Farm Gateway, Campagnette (R. 222, 4th state)
22 The Tower of London (R. 291, 2nd state)

23 Haddington (R. 357, 3rd state)
24 Rameses II. (R. 406, 2nd state)
25 Beauvais (R. 412, tenth state)
26 Yvon's, Chartres (R. 425, 3rd state)
27 The Royal Scottish Academy, Edinburgh

SYDNEY LEE (b. 1866)
28 The Street with the Tower

FRANK BRANGWYN, R. A. (b. 1867)
29 St. Nicholas, Paris
30 The Black Mill

WILLIAM LEE HANKEY (b. 1869)
31 G. H. Q., France (H. 143)
32 The Milkmaid (H. 148)

ROBERT SPENCE (b. 1871)
33 Pepys at Gravesend

NELSON DAWSON
34 Launching the Lifeboat on the Scottish Coast

CHARLES H. BASKETT (b. 1872)
35 Low Tide at Dawn. Aquatint
36 Evening. Aquatint
37 Wyvenhoe. Aquatint

ALBANY HOWARTH (b. 1872)
38 St. William's College, York
39 Porte St. Pierre, Auxerre
40 The Rose Window, Notre Dame

FRANCIS DODD (b. 1874)

41 The Monument and Fish Street Hill. Trial proof.
42 Soho Square
43 The Doorkeeper

MUIRHEAD BONE (b. 1876)

44 The Haystack. Trial proof B.
45 Road in the Marche
46 East Bletchington
47 "Moy"
48 Rainy Night in Rome
49 Culross Roofs
50 Archway, Chioggia
51 South Coast, No. 1
52 Midnight Soup
53 Piccadilly Circus, 1915

FREDERICK LANDSEER GRIGGS (b. 1876)

54 Mortmain
55 St. Botolph's Bridge
56 Meppershall Chapel

WILLIAM WALKER (b. 1878)

57 Middelburg

AUGUSTUS JOHN (b. 1879)

58 Virginia (D. 16)
59 Rambling by the Lake (D. 116)
60 W. B. Yeats (D. 128)
61 A Girl's Head (D. 129)
62 A Girl's Head, 1914 (D. 130)

SYLVIA GOSSE (b. 1881)

63 Girl Sewing
64 Self-portrait
65 Idle Thoughts
66 "Ethel"

WESTLEY MANNING

67 Noon in Normandy

WILLIAM P. ROBINS (b. 1882)

68 Eynsford
69 A Norfolk Landscape. Aquatint.
70 Interior of a Barn
71 Barn at Rabley Heath

HESTER FROOD (b. 1882)

72 The Roman Bridge, Segovia

JAMES McBEY (b. 1883)

73 The Towy at Carmarthen
74 The Carpenter of Hesdin
75 Jewish Quarter, Tetuan
76 The Deserted Oasis
77 Français Inconnus
78 Tetuan
79 Strange Signals
80 Desert of Sinai
81 The Pool. Trial proof VI.

ERNEST STEPHEN LUMSDEN (b. 1883)

82 Esquimault, B. C. (S. 86)
83 The Fruit Shop (S. 134)
84 The Market Place (S. 143)

85 Fort and City (S. 145)
86 Trikse Monastery (S. 169)
87 The Acolyte (S. 170)
88 Ganges Boats, Morning (S. 171)
89 Hail! The Sun (S. 175)
90 The Connoisseur, Portrait of Malcolm Salaman(S. 182)

ETHEL GABAIN (b. 1883)
91 The Fur Coat
92 The Black Bow

LEON UNDERWOOD
93 The Novel, No. 3

STANLEY ANDERSON (b. 1884)
94 Rick Cutters

FRANCIS SYDNEY UNWIN (b. 1885)
95 Municipio, Florence

IAN STRANG (son of William Strang) (b. 1886)
96 A Corner in Toledo

EDMUND BLAMPIED (b. in Jersey, 1886)
97 Work in the Fields
98 Driving Home in the Rain

ERNEST COLE, sculptor (b. 1887)
99 Three Heads. Drypoint.

GERALD LESLIE BROCKHURST (b. 1890)
100 L'Eventail (4th state)
101 Fabien (published state)
102 Clytie

JOHN WHEATLEY (b. 1892)

103 Old Rogers

104 The Gamblers

105 Lal

EILEEN SOPER (b. 1908)

106 The Three Wees

107 La Barrière Cassée

INDEX

Anderson, Stanley	This catalogue No. 94
Baskett, Charles H.	35, 36, 37
Blampied, Edmund	97, 98
Bone, Muirhead	44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53
Brangwyn, Frank	29, 30
Brockhurst, Gerald Leslie	100, 101, 102
Cameron, David Young	19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27
Clausen, George	1, 2, 3
Cole, Ernest	69
Dawson, Nelson	34
Dodd, Francis	41, 42, 43
Frood, Hester	72
Gabain, Ethel	91, 92
Gosse, Sylvia	63, 64, 65, 66
Griggs, Frederick Landseer	54, 55, 56
Hankey, William Lee	31, 32
Howarth, Albany	38, 39, 40
John, Augustus E.	58, 59, 60, 61, 62
Lee, Sydney	28
Livens, Horace Mann	17, 18
Lumsden, Ernest Stephen	82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90
McBey, James	73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81
Manning, Westley	67
Robbins, William P.	68, 69, 70, 71
Short, Frank	4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9
Sickert, Walter	15, 16
Soper, Eileen	106, 107
Spence, Robert	33
Strang, Ian	96
Strang, William	10, 11, 12, 13, 14
Underwood, Leon	93
Unwin, Francis Sydney	95
Walker, William	57
Wheatley, John	103, 104, 105